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THE SPIRITUAL ARMOUR

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The Spiritual Armour

By

ST CATHERINE OF BOLOGNA

TOGETHER WITH

The Way of the Cross

By BLESSED ANGELA OF FOLIGNO

TRANSLATED FROM THE ITALIAN BY

ALAN G. McDOUGALL

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FOREWORD

Of the four Italian saints of the Middle Ages who bore the name of Catherine, two alone are well known in this country. The life-story of the saint of Siena, whose prayers and penances were instrumental in bringing to an end the "Babylonish Captivity," are a part of the history of the universal Church; and St Catherine of Genoa has become familiar to us as the subject of the great work of Baron von Hügel.[1] But Catherine de' Ricci and the Franciscan Catherine of Bologna are hardly known except to members and associates of the Orders to which they belonged. All four stand in the front rank of the Church's mystics, and the work which forms the body of this book, small though it be, is not unworthy of a place beside the better known writings of Catherine Benincasa.

Catherine de' Vigri, daughter of Giovanni, a gentleman of Ferrara, engaged in the service of the Marquis Nicholas III of Este, was born on September 8, 1413, in a house in the Via Toschi at Bologna, now demolished. This house was the ancestral home of her mother, Benvenuta Mammolini, who at the time of the saint's birth was staying there during the absence of her husband from his home in Ferrara on an embassy for his lord. The

[1] Friedrich von Hügel, *The Mystical Element of Religion as Studied in St Catherine of Genoa and her Friends*, 2 vols., second edition, London, 1923.

child was taken to Ferrara at an early age, and later became a maid of honour to the Princess Margaret, daughter of the Marquis Nicholas. Even in childhood she had a marked attraction to the religious life, and at the age of nineteen entered the convent of Corpus Domini, where dwelt a band of women under the direction of Lucia Mascheroni, who followed the rule of the Third Order of St Augustine. The community, on the suggestion of the Bishop of Ferrara, later changed their rule for that of the Poor Clares.

The saint's biographer and disciple, Suor Illuminata Bembo, relates that in the convent Catherine was an example to all in her untiring labours. She acted at various times as infirmarian, novice-mistress, and cook. A pleasant story relates how one day, having placed some loaves in the oven to bake, she was suddenly called to the church to take part in some religious office. She could not refuse to go, but she was in grave fear for the effects of her absence on her baking. On turning to give her bread a parting look, she found the lately kneaded dough already transformed into a batch of crisp loaves, beautifully baked. The memory of this incident is still kept fresh by the nuns of the convent, who on its anniversary are accustomed to send specially prepared cakes of unleavened bread to the benefactors and friends of the house.

The saint had a great love for the arts, especially for painting and music. She is

recognized as co-patron, with St Luke the Evangelist, of the followers of the pictorial arts. She was a miniaturist of some talent, and a manuscript illuminated by her hand, which once belonged to Pope Pius IX, is at present preserved at Oxford. A picture of our Lady of Mercy at Bologna was long believed to be hers, though this attribution is now questioned.

In 1456 a monastery of Poor Clares was being founded in Bologna, and a request was sent to Ferrara that some nuns from that town should be sent to initiate the new community, bringing Catherine with them as abbess. She accepted the charge, but not till a heavenly vision had commanded her to do so, and on July 20, 1456, she entered Bologna with fifteen sisters, who took up their abode in the Via Tagliapietri. The new convent was given the same name as its parent house in Ferrara, but the popular voice called and continues to call it the " Monastery of the Saint."

Here she dwelt for six years, dying on March 9, 1463. She was canonized by Clement XI on June 11, 1712. Her uncorrupted body, seated on the abbatial chair, is still to be seen in a chapel of her monastery.

The Spiritual Armour is the only writing which we have from the saint's pen. It was composed in Ferrara about the year 1438, during the abbacy of Taddea di Pio.[1] At this time the building of the convent

[1] See p. 21.

was not complete, and the saint's cell was divided off simply by matting.[1] As the book itself tells us, it was the writer's desire that it should not be published until after her death.[2] An appendix to the original book gives an account of some of her celestial visions, but this has not here been reproduced. The work was first printed, probably in 1474, by Azzoguidi of Bologna, and reissued in 1511 by Platone de Benedictis of the same city, under the title *Libro devoto de la beata Chaterina Bolognese dell' ordine del Serafico Santo Francesco, el qual essa lasciò scripto de sua propria mano.* The volume is preceded by a woodcut portrait of the saint, seated, holding a book and the abbatial cross, and by several stanzas in her honour. A canzone celebrating the saint was composed by Savonarola, of which only a portion is extant.

The first biography of St Catherine was that of Suor Illuminata Bembo,[3] mentioned above, which appeared in 1877 at Bologna. Other lives worthy of mention are those of Grassetti (Bologna, 1654), Baruffaldi (Ferrara, 1708), and Manetti (Bologna, 1841). Much information about the saint and her work is to be found in Lucio Nunez, O.F.M.: *La Santa nella storia, nelle lettere e nell' arte*, Bologna, 1913).

* * * * *

1 See p. 21. 2 See p. 21.

3 Suor Illuminata Bembo, *Specchio d' illuminazione sulla vita di S Caterina da Bologna*, Bologna, 1787.

Angela of Foligno, called by Sandaeus "Mistress of Theologians," the author of the second tractate in this volume, is known to English readers from the translation of her *Book of Divine Consolation*,[1] and from Mr. Algar Thorold's *Catholic Mysticism*.[2] For information on her life the reader is referred to these books, of the former of which a critical Latin text has lately been published by Doncoeur.[3]

Faloci-Pulignani considers that *The Way of the Cross* is not from her hand, but is rather the work of a disciple. None the less it is plainly a record of the teaching of the Beata, and may deservedly bear her name. It is preserved in a Codex of the National Library of Florence,[4] and was first published in 1888 by Mazzatinti in the *Miscellanea Francescana*. The following translation has been made from an edition published at Florence in 1919.[5]

[1] Translated by Mary G. Steegmann, with an Introduction by Algar Thorold (London, 1909).

[2] *An Essay in Aid of the Better Appreciation of Catholic Mysticism, Illustrated from the Writings of Blessed Angela of Foligno.* By Algar Thorold (London, 1900).

[3] *Le Livre de la Bienheureuse Angèle de Foligno.* Documents édités par le Père Paul Doncoeur, avec le concours de Mgr. Faloci Pulignani, Paris and Toulouse, 1925.

[4] Cod. Panciatichiano 38, National Library of Florence.

[5] *La Via della Croce.* Introduction by Sig. Guido Battelli.

Grant unto us thy servants, O God, that we may be aided by the prayers of blessed Catherine the Virgin; by the odour of whose ointments we are drawn joyfully unto thy holy things. Through Christ our Lord.

* * * * *

O God, thou sweetness of our hearts and light of the blessed, who didst refresh blessed Angela thy handmaid with wondrous contemplation of heavenly things; grant that through her merits and intercession we may so know thee upon earth that we may merit to rejoice in the revelation of thy glory in heaven. Through Christ our **Lord.**

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THE SPIRITUAL ARMOUR

THE SPIRITUAL ARMOUR

Jesus—Maria

By the sweet and delightsome love, Jesus Christ, I reverently beseech all persons soever to whom shall come knowledge of this little work, made with God's help by me, the poor little dog that barks beneath the table of the excellent and most delicate handmaids and brides of the immaculate Lamb Christ Jesus, Sisters of the Monastery of the Body of Christ in Ferrara, that they guard themselves from the sin of infidelity, and also that they repute it not to the vice of presumption, nor take any scandal from this present little book. The which I, the little dog aforesaid, have written with mine own hand, solely for fear of the divine rebuke if I should be silent concerning what might be of help to others; and considering also, as the sweet memory of past saints declares in their books, that every creature ought to render itself worthy of the praise of its Creator, by manifesting the divine Providence which that divine Creator has conferred upon it. And in this is known supremely the infinite charity of our Lord God, when of his clemency he deigns to aid and preserve his creation from day to day, remembering it amid the continuous dangers that surround it; and through this have we increase of faith towards him, God our true Maker, knowing him to be the Preserver of that his workmanship.

§ 1. HERE BEGINNETH THE TREATISE OF THE SPIRITUAL ARMOUR

In the name of the eternal Father, and of his only-begotten Son, Christ Jesus, the splendour of his Fatherly glory, for love of whom I cry out with rejoicing of heart, saying unto his beloved handmaids and spouses: "Every lover that loveth the Lord, let her come to the dance, singing of love; let her come dancing, wholly inflamed, longing only for him who has created her, and separated her from the dangerous estate of the world, setting her in the most noble cloister of holy religion, in order that therein, being purged of every stain of sin, and putting on the adornment of holy and noble virtues, repairing the beauty of her soul and bringing it back to its first state of innocence, she may worthily, after this pilgrimage, enter in unto the glorious couch of her most chaste and virginal bridegroom, Jesus. From whose hands she will receive that reward of triumphant glory which he has prepared for those who, for his love's sake, turn from the vain pleasures of this lustful world, and submitting themselves to the rule of reason and forsaking their own judgement, have recourse to the safe refuge of holy religion, offering themselves in all things to the will of others, following the way of holy obedience, and forsaking their own will in all things.

But because this cannot be without doing

violence to oneself, I will set forth here below, after a little space, some instructions for the comfort of those persons who have entered on this most noble warfare of obedience, and yet, being mightily assailed and molested by their own will and opinions and judgements, are much saddened, thinking thereby to lose all the merit of obedience; which thing is not the truth, seeing that every virtue is made perfect by its contrary. That this is true I will show a little further on, when I speak of the most excellent and comely virtue of obedience, which is fittingly called noble, royal, and imperial.

Therefore he that desireth to pass without danger and in blessedness from the way to the fatherland, let him take this for the most gentle, noble and delicate spouse that he may find; and as an impenetrable shield this shall give us full victory over our enemies, and guide us to the salutary seat of eternal retribution, even as Christ said: *Qui sequitur me non ambulat in tenebris, sed habebit lumen.* But because at the outset, and even unto the close of this battle, it is necessary for us to pass through the stormy sea—that is, by the way of many and painful temptations and mighty conflicts—therefore in the beginning, here below, I will set forth certain weapons powerful for combating lawfully against the wiles of our enemies. But it is necessary for whomsoever willeth to enter on this battle that he set not ever down his arms, since never do his enemies sleep. Courage

therefore! with great fervour and confidence let us take up arms to the praise of Christ Jesus.

Whatsoever person there be of so noble and gentle a heart that he wills to take up the cross for Jesus Christ our Saviour, who died upon the field of battle in order to make us to live, let him first take to him the weapons that are needful for such battle, and particularly those which follow in order hereafter. The first is *diligence;* the second, *distrust of self;* the third, *trust in God;* the fourth, *memoria passionis;* the fifth, *memoria mortis propriae;* the sixth, *memoria gloriae Dei;* the seventh and last, *the authority of Holy Scripture*, even as Christ Jesus gave ensample thereof in the desert. The soul which is espoused with the priceless ring of good will—that is, of divine love—if she willeth to serve God in a spirit of truth, ought first of all to cleanse her conscience by pure and entire confession, and to form a most firm purpose of willing never more to commit mortal sin, but rather to suffer death a thousand times, if such were possible. For the person who is in mortal sin is not a member of Christ, but of the devil, and is deprived of the goods of holy Mother Church, and cannot do aught that is meritorious unto eternal life; but to will to serve God faithfully, there is needed a purpose of not sinning mortally, as is said above. But note: if thou chance to be in mortal sin, despair not ever of the divine goodness, and cease not

to do what good thou canst, in order that, by means thereof, thou mayst come forth from sin; and with this hope indeed thou dost good always, in what state soever thou art. Besides this, it is fitting that the faithful servant of Christ dispose himself to go by the way of the cross; since it behoves all those, who will serve God, to take up the combat against God's enemies, and to receive divers painful assaults at their hands. Therefore it is necessary to have good and trusty weapons to fight vigorously against them, and in particular those which here follow.

§ 2. OF THE FIRST WEAPON, WHICH IS DILIGENCE

I say, then, that the first weapon is *diligence* —that is, zeal for good works—seeing that Holy Scripture curseth them that are lukewarm and negligent in the way of God. It is the office of the Holy Ghost to breathe into us good inspirations, but it is our duty to accept them and to put them into operation, continually doing violence to our sensuality, which ever inviteth us to the contrary of that which the Spirit willeth; and therefore is it necessary to resist it with true diligence, and not to let the time granted to us pass without bearing fruit of good works, as it is written: " He that willeth to ascend ought not to rest, but ever exercise himself in God, in thoughts, words, and deeds;" yet with

discretion, in order that when our adversary, like a wicked traitor, assails us from behind, we may defend ourselves. He assails us from behind when, under the appearance of good, he wills to slay thee; for there is danger in too much even as in too little. I said to thee likewise, with discretion, for this teaches and perfects all the other virtues, even as said that glorious teacher of the Holy Fathers of old, St Antony of Vienne.

Therefore it behoves us with true discretion to fulfil all spiritual and temporal virtues, since the enemy, when he sees that he cannot prevent the handmaid of Christ from welldoing, seeks to ensnare her by making her attempt too much. Let all the virtues therefore be practised with due moderation, in order that the weapon of true and diligent discretion may be exercised by us to our salvation and to the praise of Christ.

§ 3. OF THE SECOND WEAPON, WHICH IS DISTRUST OF SELF

The second weapon is *distrust of self*—namely, that one believe firmly and without doubt that he shall never be able of himself to do aught that is good; even as Jesu Christ said: *Sine me nihil potestis facere;* nor even be able mightily to resist the fury of the hellish foes, in view of their guile and malice. And let none trust in her own wisdom, for if she shall do so, let her know that, by a

just judgement, she shall fall into great destruction, since the enemy is more evil than we—nay, he is evil itself. And therefore have I said that the second weapon for the battle against him is not to trust in oneself. And blessed is she that hath in herself this most noble character. And the greater the state in which a religious woman is—by her virtue, or by reason of her filling some office of authority—so much the greater need hath she of this. Whereof heard I this ensample of an old and tried religious, himself a superior, who said that when he chanced to do anything about the rule of the monastery pertaining to his office, if he did it according to his own seeming, God was wont in general to allow that some annoyance should fall out to him therefrom, but when, on the other hand, he did it with counsel, and according as it seemed good to the greater part of his subjects, it always fell out to him to have been well done, and he was much consoled by it. Shall then a subject—and especially she that is but newly entered into religion—have such boldness as to wish to live only after her own stubborn will and fervour, and not rather after the counsel and will of her superior or mistress, in order that the virtue of holy humility may shine forth in her, and the weapon of distrust in self be wielded by her, unto the praise of Christ?

§ 4. OF THE THIRD WEAPON, WHICH IS CONFIDENCE IN GOD

The third weapon is *confidence in God*, and for his love's sake, with great readiness of spirit, not to fear manfully to engage in battle with the devils and the world and even with our own flesh, the which is given us that it may serve the spirit. And therefore, let us cast these adversaries beneath the feet of our affection, trusting in God, with a firm hope that he will abundantly bestow on us his grace, by means whereof we shall have full victory over all our enemies, knowing that he will not abandon whoso hopeth in him. Although the handmaid and bride of Christ sometimes find herself, by God's permission, in such grave and painful storms that from her heart she cries to heaven, saying: *My God, forsake me not*, yet the more she fears and doubts that she be forsaken, the more is she then, by a divine and secret mystery, raised to supreme perfection with God. Of this have we ensample in his only Son, when, being at the point of a painful and most bitter death, he cried out, saying: *Pater, quare me dereliquisti?* And we know none the less truly how at that point Christ, the true Son of God, triumphed in supreme and true perfection, for the fulfilment of the obedience of the eternal Father, with whom he was perfectly united, although then, as a passible

and mortal man, he said: *My God, why hast thou forsaken me?* But this was because the divinity, united inseparably to himself, really left the human and sensitive part to its own nature; and this was willed by justice, so that the painful obedience of Christ might cancel the sinfulness of our first father's disobedience. Now, returning to our purpose, let not the handmaid of Christ fear that she will be forsaken, although at some time it doth so appear, knowing how our God, the eternal Father, lets nought attack her which he did not also allow to assail his own Son; but when she findeth herself in the greatest strait and tribulation, let her then have more confidence in the divine help, remembering the sweet promise that he made, saying to us by the mouth of his prophet: *Cum ipso sum in tribulatione, eripiam eum et glorificabo.* Who, then, will not desire to be in tribulation, in order to have so faithful and sweet a companion, who promised to be with his faithful in the time of adversity? O what great cause have we therefore to will rather to be in tribulation than to be consoled! In this then have ye firm hope, so that the third weapon of trust in God may be wielded by us to the praise of Christ.

§ 5. OF THE FOURTH WEAPON, WHICH IS *MEMORIA PASSIONIS*

The fourth weapon is the remembrance of the most glorious pilgrimage of the immaculate Lamb Jesus Christ: and particularly of his most holy passion and death, keeping alway present before the eyes of our understanding his most chaste and virginal humanity. And this is the best remedy whereby to overcome in every contest; and without it shall we not gain the victory over our enemies, and every other weapon will be of but little help without this, which surpasseth all others. O most glorious passion, remedy for our every wound! O most faithful mother, which dost lead thy children to the heavenly Father! O true and sweet refuge in all adversities! O sustaining nurse, that dost guide childlike minds to the summit of perfection! O refulgent mirror, which dost illumine them that look upon thee and dost repair their deformity! O impenetrable shield, that dost most potently defend whoso taketh shelter under thee! O truly refreshing hospice for pilgrim souls! O unfailing spring that dost refresh the thirsty, parched with desire of thee! O sea most abundant to him that saileth upon thee, his bark well piloted! O sweetest olive-tree, that spreadest thy branches throughout all the world! O delightsome bride to the soul that is ever

enamoured of thee, and looketh not towards others! In this, therefore, O sisters most dear and near to my heart, exercise yourselves untiringly, looking upon its brilliant splendour, so that, by its mediation, ye may preserve the beauty of your souls. And truly this passion is that most gentle mistress, which will lead you, most beloved novices, to the beauty of all the virtues; and through it shall ye lay hold at last on the prize of victory, to the praise of Christ.

§6. OF THE FIFTH WEAPON, WHICH IS *MEMORIA MORTIS PROPRIAE*

The fifth weapon is *memoria mortis propriae*, for we must die; and this present time is called a time of mercy, wherein from day to day God awaiteth, that we may amend our life from good to better. And if we do not so, we must give account not only of the evil we have done, but also of the good that, through our negligence, has been left undone; therefore well saith the glorious apostle Paul: *Dum tempus habemus, operemur bonum.* Therefore it is of great benefit often to remember death, and to remain continually ready therefor, since we know not either the day or the hour when the most strict Judge shall summon us; unto whom we must give account of the talent of good will granted to us, that we might exercise it to his praise, and the

salvation of our soul and those of our neighbours. But let the novices look well to themselves, as hath been said above, that, through too great confidence in themselves, they go not outside the rule imposed by their superiors and mistresses; but rather let them apply all their zeal to walking by that way which is set before them, for the governance of their soul and body. This I say because sometimes the enemy, with guileful malice, sets before the minds of those who are but little instructed in the spiritual warfare, that they must soon die, and that they shall have little to take with them if they do not other penance; and by this means the evil one incites and solicits them to perform such in excess of the rule of true obedience, the which without any doubt is more meritorious than is any penance that it were possible to do. And so it is necessary to use this weapon of the remembrance of our death with fitting prudence, in order that it may be wielded to the salvation of our soul and to the praise of Christ.

§ 7. OF THE SIXTH WEAPON, WHICH IS *MEMORIA GLORIAE DEI*

The sixth weapon is the remembrance of the good things of paradise, which are prepared for them that strive lawfully and abandon all the vain pleasures of this present life. For the most holy Doctor St

Augustine saith that it is impossible to enjoy the goods both of the present and of the future. Wherefore, beloved sisters, desire ye to be content with having never in this world any pleasure or delight; and let not weariness of denying your own will grow up in you, remembering that which our patriarch St Francis said—namely, that the most excellent gift which may be had of God in this world is that the servant of Jesus Christ may know and will to conquer himself, denying his own will. He said moreover: So great is the good that I look for, that every pain is a delight to me; to show how he gloried in suffering ill for remembrance of the eternal goods. And for confirmation of the joys that are prepared for you, dearest sisters, I will set forth here this ensample. When I entered this present monastery, there entered soon after me a damsel, upon whom, after she had been here some little space, there came a tediousness of well-doing, and she repented of having forsaken the life of the world. It fell out that, being in such purpose, she went to confession to a most approved servant of Christ, to whom she told how she had a will to return to the world. He replied to her in amazement, saying: Daughter, look well what thou dost, for to my understanding it is thou concerning whom I had this night, or rather this last morning, a vision whereat I wondered greatly, knowing not what it might mean or signify. I beseech thee, said she, be

pleased to tell it me. And he replied: I was led to a most comely festal assembly, where were numberless maidens, who all shone forth with beauty unspeakable, surpassing the sun; they were clothed in wondrous glory, and upon their heads they wore garlands of most beautiful flowers; and thus adorned they went forth to meet a damsel, who made as if she wished to go in their company, and therefore they went to meet her with much rejoicing and festive honour and glory, willing to receive her. When she was quite near unto them, meseemed that she repented that she had come, and she turned away backward. When that most noble company saw her so to do, methought that they were all exceeding saddened; at this moment the vision disappeared, but now I understand truly that in thy coming God hath laid it open to me. And for this cause I beseech thee, daughter, that thou follow not thine evil will and temptation, but stand firm and persevere even to the end, so that at last thou mayst come unto that most noble festival and company which I saw, and so rest for ever with those glorious virgins, the which await thee. When she heard this, she decided to stand firm with us, more for shame than for aught else; but a short time having passed, seeing that she bore herself not religiously, she was sent back to her people, and a little space thereafter she ended her life in the vanity of the world; and thus was verified

the vision of the servant of God, for losing the crown of her virginity, justly was she deprived of ascending to that virginal lordship, which the servant of Christ had seen. Wherefore, beloved sisters, be ye firm and constant, persevering in good works for the sole love of your Lord God alone, and hope ye firmly in the goods of Paradise, that ye may at last come unto them, saying with our seraphic St Francis: *Me exspectant iusti, donec retribuas mihi*, to the praise of Jesus Christ. Amen.

§8. OF THE SEVENTH WEAPON, WHICH IS THE AUTHORITY OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

The seventh weapon with which we can overcome our enemies is the authority of Holy Scripture: the which we ought to carry in our heart, and to take counsel of it, as of a most faithful mother, in all things the which we have to do; as we read of the most prudent and holy virgin St Cecily, where it is said: *Absconditum semper evangelium Christi gerebat in pectore suo.* And with this weapon our Saviour Jesus Christ overcame and put to confusion the devil in the wilderness, saying: *Scriptum est, non in solo pane vivit homo sed in omni verbo quod procedit de ore Dei.* Therefore, most beloved sisters, do not let the lessons that are read daily in choir and at table be all in vain, and think again how

the Gospels and Epistles that ye hear every day at Mass are, as it were, new letters sent to you by your heavenly Bridegroom, with great and fervent love laying them up in your breast; and, as often as ye can, think ye upon them, especially when ye are in your cell, so that better and more securely ye may sweetly and most chastely embrace him who sends them to you. Doing this, ye will continually find yourselves consoled, seeing that ye so often receive news of him whom ye supremely love. O how sweet and pleasant is the divine speech of Christ Jesus in the soul of her who in truth is inflamed with him! Now is not the teaching of the Gospel the very word of the honey-sweet mouth of Christ? Assuredly yes. How attentively therefore ought ye to hear and taste of it!

And here I make an end of the aforesaid weapons. But of this I pray you, dearest sisters, that ye know how to use them prudently, and that ye be never without them, so that ye may the better obtain the triumph of victory over your adversaries. And look well to yourselves that ye be not deceived under the appearance of good, for the devil sometimes appears under the semblance of Christ or of the Virgin Mary, or in the figure of some angel or saint. But in every apparition that comes to you, take ye the weapon of Holy Scripture, which tells how the mother of Christ bore herself,

when the angel Gabriel appeared unto her, saying unto him: *Qualis est ista salutatio?* And this manner hold ye also in every apparition and vision that cometh to you, desiring to certify yourselves, as well as may be, if it be a good or an evil spirit, before ye give heed thereunto: and blessed are they that shall so do! It is no less necessary moreover to keep good watch over the thoughts of your mind; since the devil sometimes puts good and holy thoughts into the mind in order to deceive it under the appearance of virtue; and after this, showing himself as he is, mightily allures and tempts to the vice which is the contrary of that virtue; and this the enemy does in order that he may be able to lead the person into the slough of despair.

The dowry that Christ Jesus wills of you, is that in battle ye be strenuous—that is, brave and constant fighters—so that, by means of the virtue of patience ye display, ye may obtain the meet reward. For this cause, therefore, will ye to apply your zeal to bear and sustain many tribulations, vexations, stresses, infirmities, mockeries and painful death, from what side soever they come. For by these and the like things ye shall be certain that ye bear the nuptial ornaments—that is, the standard of Christ Jesus, who, as ye know, saith to his delicate bride, the cross of love: Thou shalt bear me, even as I suffered on thee, O my spouse. And again he saith: He who would ascend unto me,

the well of life, must go by a narrow way. Now, therefore, most beloved sisters, have in your remembrance the saving conditions of your ornaments, so that ye may securely await the great and magnificent embassy which will be sent unto you by your Bridegroom. Thus adorned shall ye be able to receive his invitation and ascend to such greatness. O how blessed shall ye be then! Ye will taste the fruit of the griefs and bitter pains and fatigues that ye have borne, with true patience persevering in the place to which God hath called you, and doing this, ye shall not find yourselves in any confusion and falseness, as do I, who have not delighted, as behoved me, in bearing the cross of Christ, wherefore I can well say that in justice I expect nought else than ruin and confusion *coram Deo et hominibus.* But notwithstanding all this, remembering what the prophet said—namely, *Etiam si mortuus fuero, in misericordia tua sperabo*—I will not deprive myself of that excellent virtue called Hope, which, speaking to me, said of her courtesy that I shall truly be able to mount unto heaven if in this world I have not where to lay my head; that I shall find there exceeding great pleasure if here I have alway some ill to bear; that there I shall be greatly honoured if here for Christ's sake I be little esteemed, afflicted and in tribulation; that in Paradise I shall be content if here I have not what I will; that in the sight of my God I shall sing sweetly if in choir I chant with humility;

that by him I shall be made immortal if here I fear not death and pain for his sake; that I shall be empress of his kingdom if here for him I live poor and a beggar; and that, if I persevere in his most chaste and virginal love, without doubt I shall rejoice with him for all eternity.

The peace of Christ, sweet love, be ever in your hearts, most dear Mothers and Sisters, and of all Christian people, by whom may he be ever blessed and praised, who is our true God and mine, in perfect Trinity, and the incarnate Word. Amen.

Christus Meus

I, the little dog above-named, by divine inspiration wrote this little book of myself, with mine own hand, in the monastery of the Body of Christ, in the cell where I was dwelling, which was covered with mats, and in the time of the most reverend Lady Abbess Suor Taddea, who was the sister of Messer Marco de' Pii, about the year of our Lord Messer Jesu Christ, 1538. And in my life I have not shown it to any person whatsoever.

To the praise of Christ Jesus. Amen.

THE WAY OF THE CROSS

THE WAY OF THE CROSS

THERE FOLLOWS A GOOD AND USEFUL TEACHING TO GIVE THE SOUL KNOWLEDGE OF THE WAY THAT IT MUST TAKE IF IT WILL COME TO A STATE OF SALVATION. THE WHICH WAS WRITTEN BY A MOST NOBLE AND DEVOUT LADY OF THE CITY OF FOLIGNO, WHOSE NAME WAS ANGELA.

1. THE supreme good of the soul is true and perfect peace, without the which peace no other good sufficeth the reasonable soul. And therefore the whole effort of the soul ought to be toward the acquiring in herself of that true peace. And this peace can she not have apart from a perfect love of her Creator. For in the perfect love of God is rest found. Let him, then, who desireth perfect rest do his endeavour to love God with his whole heart, since in such a heart God dwelleth, who alone giveth or can give peace. Now he that willeth to love God perfectly must dispossess himself wholly of the love of every creature, for he may have no mean between himself and God. And so many such means are there as there be things which a man loves or may love apart from God. And so, to be brief, he who desireth to possess perfect peace, let him cast away all other love, and love none other thing but God, or for God's sake, and in short while shall he come to that love which in the beginning is hard. For needs must he

go by the thorny way of the cross of Christ, the which alone it is that leadeth to that true peace whereof we have spoken.

2. Now he that would know what is this way of the cross, and of what kind, let him know what was revealed to a certain holy soul concerning the same. For this soul, desiring to know and to return to the way of the cross, did the Lord God inspire that if she willed to follow that way, she must needs despoil herself, that she might be the lighter, and go naked to the cross. And this signifieth that first of all she must pardon all those who had offended her; and afterward must she strip herself bare of all earthly things, and of the love of all men and women, friends and kinsfolk, nay even of herself, and without any mean give her whole heart singly to Christ the blessed. Lo, soul, how the Lord willeth thee to be without mean of created love, and without burden of worldly things. Begin, therefore, to go by this way of the cross.

3. And the first beginning is that thou put away and remove from thee all love of earthly things. And so, as far as thou mayst, love and keep poverty, following the counsel of our supreme and perfect Master Christ, for, seek thou never so well, nought shalt thou find in him from his birth of the Virgin unto his death on the cross, save the extremest poverty. O safe way, speedy way, way undefiled, holy way, that poverty of Jesus Christ, the which he desireth to find in his

perfect disciple, even as he saith in the Gospel, *He that renounceth not all things that he possesseth, cannot be my disciple.* And that this way seem not hard to thee, he doth promise and give thee an infinite guerdon, if thou dost observe that poverty that hath been spoken of. Whence it is written in the holy Gospel: *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* Now who is there so simple and foolish, that to gain so infinite a treasure he would not renounce those vain riches of the world, the which surely in truth may rather be called poverty, since they sate not the soul, nay more, even afflict the body, without true and perfect peace? Assuredly therefore he is a fool indeed who will not give a little to gain so much, who will not give mire and clay to gain gold, who will not give that which may be lost and must at last be left behind for that which may not be lost for ever. Wherefore said our Master Jesus Christ: *Lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where thief cannot take away, nor aught corrupt or destroy.*

4. Wouldst thou possess this treasure, O soul? Leave the things of the world, and naked follow Christ, who willed to die naked upon the cross for thee. Thou likewise must be naked, thou soul that wouldst be a perfect disciple of Jesus Christ. Wherefore it behoveth thee without cease to do battle with the spirits of wickedness—the which also are naked, for nought of their own do

they possess in the world. For I say that he who striveth with one that is naked, being himself fully clothed, shall soon be thrown to the ground, since he hath that whereby he may be laid hold upon and made to fall. Let him then who would gain the victory over his enemy cast away his garments, that he be not laid hold upon thereby and made to fall. The garments of man's body are all the things of earth. See also, soul, how it behoveth thee to go naked of the world's things, since it is thy part to follow and to run after thy guide, the which is Jesus Christ, who hath run mightily; and therefore, if thou wouldst follow him fittingly, lay aside every burden that impedeth thee in thy course and overtake him. Hear what St Peter said to him: *We have left all things and followed thee.* Thou didst well, St Peter, for if thou wert burdened thou couldst not well follow Christ, who ran speedily. And what runner is there who, having to go in short time a great way, would not lighten himself of all that he might, that he might run the more speedily and with less hindrance?

5. But a little while hast thou, O soul, and the journey that thou hast to make is that from earth to heaven; and the road is exceeding long. And think, O soul, how this poverty of Christ is to be taken; if thou becomest poor for his sake, he will of good will be with thee. And who is this who for thy poverty's sake will bear thee company? This is he who hath with him an infinite

treasure, the which is enough to satisfy with infinite riches, in supreme glory, all as many as follow him. See, therefore, how that without him there is the greatest poverty. Hear this that he saith: *All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth;* so that, having him, thou hast all and supreme good, both in this life and in the other. O poverty that is not known, and therefore is not loved, which hath such great fruit hidden in itself! This holy poverty is to my seeming the beginning and foundation of all good. Upon the which foundation if thou, O soul, dost build thy house, neither wind nor wave shall make it to fall, and with every man thou shalt have peace.

6. If, therefore, O soul, thou hast perfect poverty, thou hast put away that mean which holdeth thee from perfect union and conjunction with the most good Master. And the first degree of that perfect poverty have we set forth, the which is neither to have nor to desire aught of the things of the world, save so much as is sufficient for the straitest necessity. But even this poverty is not enough for thee, O soul, save thou also turn aside from the love of every person, yea, thy father and mother and daughter, and from the love even of thine own body. And by this I mean when such love of kinsfolk or of any other cuts thee off from the true love of the supreme Father, eternal God. For then hast thou set a mean between thyself and God, when thou lovest aught that

separateth thee from his love. And this, as said a certain holy soul, is the reason why many who seem very spiritual are deceived, for although they do great penance, living in continual bodily discipline, they come not to a perfect state, having either towards their own selves or some other some special love which is a mean between them and God. And because of these means that they withhold, they are fickle and stand not firm. So that although at times they perceive a sweetness of God in their soul, they soon turn aside unto fables, and to murmuring, and to the uttering of vain and worldly things, as though they had not felt nor tasted aught of God. And in this are they like flies, which at one time are found amid honey, and at another go rather to spittle or some like filth.

7. Wouldst thou see, O soul, how such as these are lukewarm in God's love, though they do great penance? Now is it to be thought that the passion of the Son of God is so efficacious in the soul that is well disposed and joined with God, that one single thought and meditation thereof should break every human heart? And many there are who think thereon day and night, nay, who bewail it with the shedding of many tears, yet none the less they change not their lives, but are sterile in God, even as though they had never thought thereon, nor had had any affection thereunto. And surely this is for no other reason than that they have kept

back some mean in themselves, the which letteth them not be conjoined with God, nor God with them. Let them, therefore, cast away these means, and free their hearts from the inordinate love of any created thing; either our own selves or aught outside ourselves. And if a man be in such an estate that he may not be without the possession of property and riches, at least let him have his heart empty of the love of these things. And if he lose them, let him so be content, and hold that loss for a great gift of God. And if he see himself to prosper and to have abundance of earthly things, let him hold them suspect, and be always in fear lest he be not among the elect of God. For of such things the enemies of God have greater plenty in this world than do his friends. And so he that aboundeth in these earthly riches ought to have great fear, that it be not God who giveth them to him, and to cease to hold as his final reward any good that he have wrought or may work in this life, for such good is not worthy to be compared with the eternal joys and riches of the life everlasting.

8. See to it therefore, O soul, that thou set not thy love upon temporal riches, if such thou hast, nor make vain use of them. And so, if it be that thou canst not to outward appearance go and come and exist and live as a poor man, by reason of some state of honour that thou hast in the world, which lets and prevents thee from being and showing

in outward appearance that which thou oughtest to have within, have a zeal none the less to despoil thine affections and desires of the love of them, so that if in some way they come to be destroyed without fault of thine, thou receive it as a special grace of God. And if they be not destroyed or lost, use them at least as temperately as thou mayst. And if thou canst hiddenly wear some poor garment, do so. And take ensample of that noble and holy virgin Cecily, who clothed herself outwardly in rich and ornate vesture, by reason of the nobility of her station, but against her flesh wore rough cloth of hair. And take thy pleasure, O soul, in willingly frequenting the company of Christ's poor rather than that of the rich and worldly. And understand this of such times as it behoveth thee to have converse with folk; since, as for myself, it pleases me rather that, so far as thou canst, thou shouldst separate thyself, and take thy delight in being alone with the poor Jesus, for continually thinking on his poverty will make thine own poverty thy supreme pleasure. And if thou hast riches, it will make thee to disprize them with all thy heart, so that thou shalt be freed of every mean between thyself and God. Lo, then, the first degree of the true way: to be poor of the things of this world with perfect willingness. And this giveth thee perfect outward peace with all human creatures. But the riches of the world do and cause the contrary to this.

9. But this poverty bringeth thee not to perfect peace, if thou hast not therewith another, for thou wilt be little acceptable to God for being poor and despoiled of earthly and temporal things, if thou be still clothed and burdened with vices, and hast not despoiled thyself of thy carnal will. So that, if thou wouldst have this perfect peace, thou must needs despoil thyself of every vice, and continually make thy soul and body live in the following of the cross of Christ, so that thou willest not in any thing to satisfy either thy soul or thy body, except in so far as it be a way and cause of making thee conjoined with Christ the blessed. And this is the way of the cross of the good Jesus, the which willed never to do aught save that which was pleasing to his Father, as he well showed at the time of his passion. For knowing all that he must suffer, the sensitiveness of his flesh assailed him, and he said, as it is written: *Father, if it be possible, take from me this pain and passion, that I bear it not, yet nevertheless not my will but thine be done.* Now likewise do thou, O soul, on this cross deprive thy body and heart of all their will and follow that of the Lord alone, howsoever hard and bitter it seem to thee. And see a great wonder, that this cross makes thee to live without a cross, so that, if thou takest it up perfectly, without doubt shalt thou have perfect peace, since then the soul is agreed with God, and therefore her cross to her is not a cross, since it

is the pleasure of God that thus she bear it. And living in this state, she is so content that no pain is pain to her. And thus she comes unto such a desire, thinking upon the pains of Christ, that she would sustain and bear all those pains of soul and body which all the elect have had or are yet to have, for the love of Christ Jesus.

10. Seek therefore, O soul, and study to bear and carry thy cross, following after the cross of Christ, which taketh away every cross from thee. And consider that, if thou leavest aside the sweet cross of Jesu Christ, thou canst not live without a cross in this life, nor after it in the other. For let us suppose that thou hast in this life some refreshment in these outward and worldly things, if thou examine well the fatigues and toils and dangers which thou incurrest and bearest daily in divers ways, through their means, both outwardly in body, and inwardly in thy soul, they may the rather be called war than peace. And this falleth out because the soul is departed from the way and the will of her Creator. Wherefore thou canst have but little true peace or rest save thou return to his obedience. And though the whole world gave her outward peace, yet is pain found inwardly, by reason of the fault that she hath committed. And therefore said a holy doctor, speaking to God: *Lord, thou hast made such a law, that every disordered soul is her own punishment.* And then is the soul disordered when she departs from the obedience of her Lord.

And if the soul be so foolish that she will not obey God, but wills rather to follow after the delight of created things, God sometimes judgeth her after this manner, that in every thing wherein she takes delight she finds pain and grief, so that she feels no pleasure therefrom save it be mingled so much with its contrary that she findeth but little consolation or delight therein, and then at the end she cometh to torment that hath no end. Even as Christ Jesus showeth thee by the example in his Gospel of that rich man, who besought but a drop of water and might not have it. O how vain a thing is every worldly delight, since it sufficeth for so little, and how evil a thing, since it hath so evil an end—namely, an end of infinite pain!

11. Therefore, O soul, reck little of every worldly delight, and in this understand all honour, all riches and all comfort of body, in whatsoever thing it may delight, apart from that which is necessary, and follow the cross of Christ. For he chose to be and was poor above all other both in life and death, bearing and carrying in his body every pain and every dolour, and being esteemed as nought. O soul, consider that it was to save thee that he bore these things. And how doth it not shame thee that thou willest to follow after and to go by another way than that whereby went thy guide and thy head? Thy head, Jesu Christ, began upon a cross, and thus was he throughout his

journey, and on the cross he ended his life. Why, therefore, dost thou delay, why art thou so negligent and slothful, why dost thou hesitate to mount upon, to dwell upon, and to end upon the cross? If thou art always upon the cross, Christ Jesus the crucified will be always with thee, and will cause thy cross to seem sweet to thee; and this is the way that shall lead thee to paradise. Let it not be thy belief that thou, that art so full of every defect, canst pass by any other way to glory than that by which the Son of God hath gone, who was full of all grace and virtue and without any defect.

12. Arouse thyself, therefore, and give thyself with all zeal to do what penance thou canst, fittingly, keeping thyself always from the deceit of the sinful flesh, which unceasingly striveth against us to draw us aside from all virtue and good. And in this fervency be constant and persevering. And do not as many, who begin indeed with much fervour, but when they feel some vexation of body and the attack of the devil and the flesh, grow lukewarm and cold and follow not after the good. Wherefore the enemy redoubles his strength against them, since he findeth them cowardly and negligent, since they have too great a care for their bodies and trust but little in the help of God. Trust thyself fully, O soul, in thy good Lord, and go carefully and eagerly in the way of the cross, and God will give thee full victory over the enemy. And

despair not and grow not cold because in the beginning, and even more in the midst of thy way, thou feelest hardness and bitterness, for where great pain and toil is, there great reward is gained. And know thou that penance is likened unto the palm-tree, whose trunk is exceeding rough, but among its branches is found a fruit, the date, which is exceeding sweet.

13. Now the way of the cross is after this fashion, for when the soul is mortified by living and dying upon the cross, she findeth fruits most sweet and delightsome. And how shall the soul not find upon the cross fruit of the sweetest, since thereon is found that blessed fruit of the dear Virgin's glorious womb, whereof he that tasteth most desireth most, and after he hath tasted thereof, in truth he holdeth in disgust every other delight of this world? So that he crieth out and saith openly with St Paul: *I will not glory save in the cross.* And then he beginneth to rejoice at every pain that he hath borne or is bearing, so that he holdeth it as a great gift of God that he hath suffered pain in soul and in body, either from God through infirmities, or from his creatures after other manners. And if he were found without tribulation, he would fear lest he were forsaken of God, seeing himself to be outside that way and state which was that of our master and head Jesus Christ, whose life is our teaching and light of perfect salvation.

14. Be it thy study therefore, O soul, to

take up thy cross, the which giveth thee little weariness and infinite rest, little war and perfect peace, little sadness and infinite delight, little pain and infinite sweetness. And, therefore, thou mayst well make thy bed of the cross. And sing and say unto the Lord that which a holy soul said who had gone perfectly by the way of the cross, and therefore he said: "I praise thee, beloved God, upon thy cross I have made my bed: for pillow I rest upon poverty, and for my other lying down I take my rest in sorrow and suffering with contempt." O how good a song is this, which none may sing from a good and pure and gladsome heart save the soul that is inebriated with the death of the cross, which hath found there the unmeasured love of God!

15. Take up therefore thy cross, O soul, for it is the way, the ladder, and the gate that leadeth us to the blessed life, and without it hath none ever gone to paradise, nor shall go ever. This cross will cause thee to esteem the world as nought, to mortify the flesh, to overcome the devil and to win God, and that not only in the other life but even in this, for the happiness that he giveth thee. If thou follow his cross in this world, he will give thee his inheritance the which he gave to his Son. And because he obeyed him in carrying this cross unto the end, the Father hath exalted and honoured him beyond measure. Wherefore if thou wouldst come to his glory, bear him company here on the

cross. This is that sign wherewith he that is signed shall without doubt see the blessed face of Christ in glory eternal, and he that shall put it aside from him shall never possess that glory.

16. If then, O soul, thou wishest for true peace in the world, and from this peace to go on to peace supreme and infinite, mount thou upon the cross as has been said. May that blessed Lord who through his cross willed of his kindness to redeem us, of his infinite charity and love make thee to take and follow this way, which in this life and in the other may give thee peace and rest. Amen.

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